

Do you think that firefighting is just for men?

If you said yes, there are about 46,000 American women who would like to talk to you. Who are they? Female firefighters, of course!

Molly Williams: First Female Firefighter

The first known American female firefighter was an enslaved African American named Molly Williams. She fought fires in New York City with her owner, who was a member of the fire company. Williams is well known for helping men pull a pumper through deep snow to a fire during a blizzard in 1818.

Female Firefighters Increase

Other women in the 1800s and early 1900s followed Williams’s lead. They helped operate pumpers and were part of bucket brigades. Women took on an even bigger role in firefighting in the 1940s; many male firefighters were away fighting in World War II, so women filled their places.

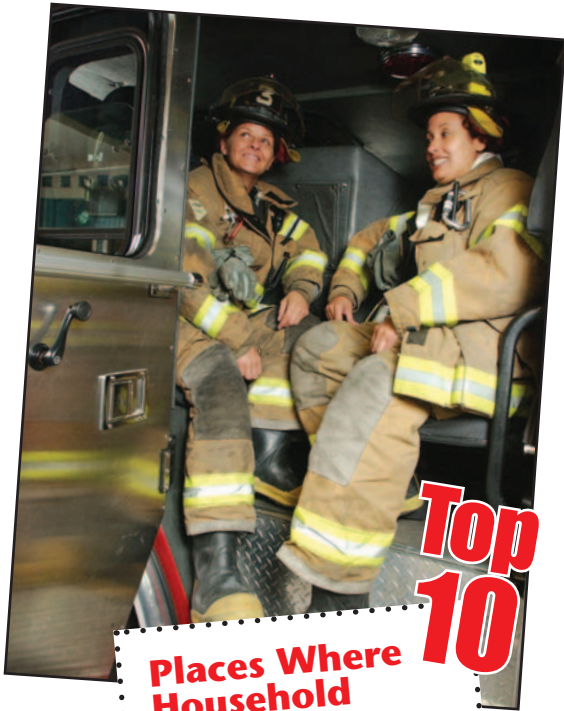
But it took a long time for people to believe that women could fight fires as well as men could. Many men did not want women to be part of their departments. It wasn’t until 1974 that a woman was hired as a full-time, paid firefighter. The city of New York began hiring female firefighters only after Brenda Berkman sued the city for not hiring women.

For
Men
Only?
NOT!

Female Firefighters Today

Thanks to women like Berkman, there are now about 6,000 American women who are paid members of fire departments, and another 40,000 working as volunteers. California has the best record for hiring women in its fire departments: In that state, there are about 1,300 female firefighters and 6 female fire chiefs.

To become firefighters, women must pass the same written and fitness tests that men do. Once a woman is a member of a fire department, she does all the same jobs as the men and uses the same equipment. When it comes to fighting fires, women have proven that they can get the job done.



Places Where Household Fires Ignite . . .

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|--------------------|-------|
| Kitchens | 27.1% |
| Bedrooms..... | 12.7% |
| Dens | 8.7% |
| Chimneys | 8.3% |
| Laundry rooms... | 3.7% |
| Heating areas..... | 3.1% |
| Garages | 2.6% |
| Bathrooms | 2.4% |
| Hallways..... | 1.4% |
| Closets..... | 0.3% |

Adapted from an article by Christine Graf